

BRITISH DOCUMENTS ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS:

REPORTS AND PAPERS FROM
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MR. Stevenson to Mr. Eden

- President Amézaga -



RALPH SKRINE STEVENSON
March 3, 1943

(No. 25.)

Sir,

Montevideo, March 3, 1943.

I HAVE the honour to report that Presiden Amézaga has formed his Council of Ministers as follows;-

Foreign Affairs: Señor José Serrato, G.C.B. (Personalities No. 38.)

National Defence: General Alfredo R. Campos, C.V.O. (Personalities No.14)

Interior: Señor Héctor A. Gerona

Finance: Señor Ricargo Cosio

Public Instruction and Social Welfare: Dr. Adolfo Folle Juanicó

Industries and Labour: Dr. Javier Mendivil

Public Works: Señor Tomás Berreta (Personalities No. 9)

Live-stock and Agriculture: Señor Arturo Gonzáliz Vidart.

Public Health: Señor Luis Mattiauda.

2. Señor Serrato, physically well-preserved, though now in his 74th year, has not previously held the portfolio of Foreign Affairs, nor, apart from having been a member of the Uruguayan delegation to the Vith Pan-American Conference (1933), has he had any working experience of diplomacy other than that acquired during his term of office as President of the Republic (1923-27). Although he had retired from public life in 1934, he consented, at President Baldomir's request, to become President of the Council of Senate which came into existence after Parliament had been dissolved on the 21st February, 1942. I understand that Señor Serrato was very reluctant to take the portfolio of Foreign Affairs when it was offered to him by President Amézaga, but was eventually prevailed upon to accept it. Señor Serrato is a staunch supporter of the Allied cause, and since 1940 has been president of the principal pro-Ally committee in Montevideo.

3. The appointment of General Campos to the portfolio which he held for the first year and a half of President Baldomir's Administration is a popular one. It is, moreover, likely to be of benefit to the country if, as is generally assumed, one of his first steps will be properly to implement, the Compulsory Military Service Act. It will be recalled that this measure, when presented by General Campos, in February 1940, aroused such opposition that he resigned his portfolio. It was, nevertheless, approved five months later, although, for political reasons, never enforced, and the introduction of compulsory service in its true form, as a period of permanent service in the army, only becomes

politically feasible as a result of a recent presidential election (please see in this connexion Chancery letter to the South American Department of the 17th December last.)

4. Señor Gerona, who is a notary by profession, had not held any official post until he became a member of the Council of State in February 1942. In July of that year he was appointed Minister of the Interior, and during the visit of Dr. Guani to the United States and Canada early this year he also acted as Minister of Foreign Affairs. Señor Gerona was head of the Uruguayan delegation to the "regional meeting" held at Rivera in September 1942 for the purpose of controlling the infiltration of enemy aliens and pro-Axis nationals over the Brazilian frontier, and was elected president of the meeting.

He is a man of 54 years of age, who, although belonging to the "Colorado" party, has never participated actively in politics. He is well-disposed towards Great Britain and is whole-hearted supporter of the cause of the United Nations. As a Minister of the Interior he will have to deal with Fifth Column activities in general and in particular with the problem of Axis nationals still employed in State institutions. He does not possess a particularly strong character, but there is some hope that, with his good intentions and with the help of the Under-Secretary of the Interior. Señor Giménez de Aréchaga, a strong and capable man, adequate measures be taken to clean up State institutions.

5. Señor Cosío, who has always been a militant "Batllista", was Finance Minister from 1925 to 1926, during the presidency of Señor Serrato. He has also been Director-General of Customs and a member of the boards of the Bank of the Republic and the Mortgage Bank. As a specialist in economic and financial matters, he has for many years past contributed articles to the *Dia* on those subjects, writing as pertinacious critic of the Government's policy. Señor Cosío was one of the twenty-eight members of the Council of State. He is a man of 54 years of age and is cousin of Don Pedro Cosío. (Personalities No. 18.)

6. Dr. Folle Juanicó, who is a lawyer, of 47 years of age, and comes from one of the oldest families of Uruguay, is a member of the "Colorado" party, but had taken no active part in politics until 1938, when he was elected president of the Electoral Court. In 1942, as a member of the Council of State, he was president of its committee dealing with electoral matters. He was president of the "Jockey Club" from 1941-42. He is very well disposed towards Great Britain.

7. Dr. Mendivil, a lawyer, of 69 years of age, was Minister of Finance from 1929-31, and held the same portfolio during the Administration of General Baldomir. He has also been president of the Bank of the Republic and of the Mortgage Bank. He is a rather colourless individual and not very energetic, but he is well-disposed, and when he can be spurred into action is helpful.

8. Señor Berrta, who was one of the members of the Council of State (1942), has not held any public post since the National Administrative Council, of which he became vice-president early in 1933, was swept away a few months later by the *coup d'Etat* of that year. As "political boss" of the Department of Canelones, his birthplace, he had, between the years 1913 and 1919, held various local political post there and was, in the recent presidential election, elected "Intendente" of Canelones and Senator for that Department. It is difficult to understand the reason for his appointment as Minister of Public Works unless it be to enable him to wield still further influence on behalf of the "Batllista" group amongst on a very large scale. Señor Berreta is now 67 years of age. I do not know him well, but he is invariably very friendly when we meet.

9. Señor Gonzalez Vidart, who took his degree in the Faculty of Agronomy in 1921, represents the Independent Nationalists in Dr. Amézaga's Cabinet. As one of the Deputies of that political group he sat in the Chamber of Representatives in 1925 and again from 1928 until 1933, when, as a consequence of the *coup d'Etat*, he had to seek asylum in Brazil. He is a professor of natural science in several of the "Lycees" of Montevideo and also continues his work in the Faculty of Agronomy.

10. Señor Mattiauda is a notary and public accountant, and holds the degree of doctor *honoris causa* in economic sciences. Although a militant member of the "Batllista" group he has never occupied any post on the Executive Committee of that political faction, but his name was included in the list of "Batllista" Senators in the recent elections. The reason for his appointment to the Ministry of Public Health are, for the moment at any rate, obscure.

11. It will be gathered from the foregoing that Dr. Amézaga has not succeeded in giving the country a Cabinet of All the Talents. There is, indeed, a very general feeling that he has lost an unique opportunity of forming a really representative Council of Ministers in which places could have been found for men of more outstanding merit than some of those now chosen. The Independent Nationalists, for their part, are, perhaps justifiably, aggrieved that their long sojourn in the wilderness and the votes they polled at the recent election have been rewarded with only a single post. Nor have they been slow

in pointing out that in this “Colorado” Cabinet, in which the “Batllistas” predominate, the portfolio allotted to their group is precisely the one which, at a moment when Uruguay is suffering from the effects of an almost unprecedented drought and the future of their live-stock industry is threatened with disaster, is the least “profitable”, politically speaking.

I have, &c.

RALPH SKRINE STEVENSON.

[A 3105/564/46]

No. 115,

Mr. Stevenson to Mr. Eden. - (Received March 31.)

(No. 27.)

Sir,

Montevideo, March 8, 1943.

I HAVE the honour to inform you that during and after the luncheon which took place on H.M.S. Cheshire on the 6th March (see my despatch No. 26 of the 8th March) I had an opportunity of holding a long conversation with President Amezaga.

2. The President was fervid in his protestations of friendship for, and admiration of, Great Britain. He recalled that he had been, throughout his legal career, closely connected with British interests and enterprises in this country. (This is perfectly true, but it is equally true that he has also been connected with some of the most important German interest in the River Plate. He was, for instance, until the commencement of his political campaign last year, joint president of the Montevideo Telephone Company, in representation of Messrs. Siemens Halske, by whom he was appointed to the board in 1934, and whose legal adviser he had been since 1930).

He repeated what he had said in his speech during luncheon about Uruguay considering herself an ally of Great Britain, and went on to say that, as soon as the United States could supply a few batteries of heavy artillery, a few batteries of anti-aircraft guns and 100 aircraft, Uruguay would declare war on the Axis, as then she would be in a position to look after herself to some extent.

At the moment she was almost completely defenceless, and would be a liability as an ally. However, what she could do now was to support Great Britain and the United States in their economic warfare measures, and he was determined to have a law passed which would enable the Government and the State institutions, such as the State Insurance Bank, to apply the Statutory and

Proclaimed Lists. I expressed cordial appreciation of his attitude and assured him that such a step would be of greatest value to ourselves and the United States.

I then went on to draw his attention to the fact that in many of the State institutions, such as the Port Administration, the State Electricity Works and the "A.N.C.A.P." a number of Germans and Italians were still employed. Such persons presented a grave danger, as they were in a position to dislocate completely the work of the institutions in which they were employed. I told him that I had warned Dr. Guani of this danger last year, when Brazil entered the war, and there was a possibility of Uruguay following suit. The President thereupon asked me whether I would be good enough to communicate to him personally and privately a list of such enemy nationals as were in a position to cause trouble, in which case he would see that they were removed. I agreed to do so.